

13 July 2011 Millions of girls are being forced out of school because of poverty, the threat of sexual violence and poor-quality schools – despite improved enrolment rates, according to a new report released today by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and RESULTS.

The report calls for governments and international financial institutions to redress the balance and give girls a fair deal. In the last decade more girls have been able to start school but they remain more likely than boys to be forced out again. In some parts of the world only one girl in ten will complete primary school.

Even when education is accessible and free there are other problems, such as recruiting female teachers and providing adequate sanitation. Girls from poor families are more likely to have to work and tend to animals and crops. If parents become sick especially because of HIV girls are expected to stay home to care for younger siblings.

Girls often have to drop out of school to be married. The report says that the best means of protecting girls from early marriage is to keep them at school. In Mozambique girls in education are 50 percent less likely to marry before they are 18.

The report says that the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, India, Iraq, Nigeria and Pakistan are among those countries failing to respect the rights of girls to an education. In sub-Saharan Africa, girls have less than a 50 percent chance of finishing primary school. In some Asian countries girls also struggle: 41 percent of girls in Pakistan and 30 percent in India fail to finish primary school.

Girls' chances of finishing secondary school are even slimmer. The number of boys enrolling outstrips the number of girls in two-thirds of countries. These enormous inequalities must be tackled as a priority, researchers say.

Camilla Croso, President of the GCE, said: "Our world must no longer tolerate the constant violation of women's and girl's rights to an education. Not only has the 2005 Education For All goal of gender parity in enrolment been grossly missed, but the 2015 gender equality goal is sadly way off track. "

The report "Make It Right: Ending the Crisis in Girls' Education", which features a foreword by Graça Machel, highlights countries that have been able to improve girls' enrolment and retention in school – Jordan, Senegal, Tanzania, Tunisia and Ukraine among them.

In Bangladesh, officials in rural parts of the county are adapting school holidays around the monsoon season so that heavy rainfall does not stop children from walking to school.

The report says it is vital to tackle the causes of exclusion and drop-out. Schools must be free and made safer. Discriminatory classroom practices, stigmatization and stereotyping of girls must be stopped. Governments must underpin all this with strong financial support and specific policies to achieve gender equality in education.

The report criticizes the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). It says the organisations have inconsistent policies that are undermining countries' efforts to achieve gender equality in education. For example, despite strong gender research, multiple strategies, policies and much rhetoric about gender equality, the World Bank often fails to translate these into concrete reform in the way they invest.

The report calls for governments to act without delay to change policies. It calls on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon to lead on girls' education at the UN. It calls on donors to commit to a \$2.5 billion in a replenishment of a reformed Education for All Fast Track Initiative in November.

Grammy Award-winning musician and GCE's High Level Panellist, Angelique Kidjo, is supporting the campaign. "It's simply not acceptable that the majority of girls in Africa are still not enjoying equal rights to education, missing out on the chance to complete primary school and go to secondary school.

"We know how to solve this. Until girls are educated, we cannot effectively tackle poverty. But if girls are given the chance to learn and thrive in safe schools with good teachers, then there will be no stopping this new global force for development."

Sarah Beardmore of RESULTS, said: "We are calling on the UN Secretary General to make the education of women and girls a top priority. Fulfilling the right to education would mean the realization of all other rights, enhancing girls' and women's living conditions, dignity and citizenship."

Commenting on the report, Sandra Dworack from international agency Oxfam, said: "It is an outrage that girls are not getting the same chances in life and that in the 21st Century, in some parts of the world, less than a quarter of the female population are able to read. Education is a fundamental right for girls, not an optional extra."

Source: Global Campaign for Education